



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2020

Google LLC, as the Parent Company of YouTube
ATTN: Edward An, Senior Policy Manager
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

RE: Mental Health and Suicide Disclaimers, Warnings, and Prompts

Dear Mr. An:

We, the undersigned members of Congress, are deeply concerned about the growing number of suicides and suicide attempts in the United States, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for persons 10-24.¹ In 2017, there were an average of over 5,400 suicide attempts every day by children in grades 7-12.²

In the context of adolescents, impulsivity is a real concern. According to physicians at Michigan Health, “teens often plan their suicide for less than five minutes” before an attempt, and this impulse can be brought on by temporary stressors like the end of a first romantic relationship.³ Unfortunately, “how-to” videos about suicide, including “how to tie a noose” or “hang yourself” uploaded to YouTube (as well as other video sites), give adolescents information at their fingertips through which they can act on their impulse and complete a suicide attempt.

These alarming suicide numbers likely underrepresent the scope and magnitude of this crisis because stigma still often encumbers open and honest conversations about mental health. Eliminating stigma and increasing accessibility and affordability of mental health services and treatment are only part of the solution that we are working on in the 116th Congress. We recognize that legislative action alone is insufficient, and we look to private companies like yours to fill in the gaps.

¹ <https://americanspcc.org/teen-suicide-facts/>

² *Id.*

³ <https://healthblog.uofmhealth.org/childrens-health/preventing-teen-suicide-when-to-remove-firearms-from-your-home>

We write to YouTube specifically due to its popularity in reaching audiences around the world as one of the largest video platforms available. We appreciate that YouTube's policies expressly state that "[t]he safety of our creators, viewers, and partners is our highest priority" and that content promoting suicide, self-harm, or is intended to shock or disgust users is against company policy.⁴ We further appreciate the difficulty in policing YouTube given the sheer volume of videos posted to the site. Nevertheless, we respectfully suggest that YouTube can do more to help curtail the suicide crisis, and we stand ready and willing to collaborate to help bring about reforms.

According to a recent study, only three to eight percent of "how-to" videos that concerned "suicide" or "how to hang yourself" were age-restricted.⁵ YouTube videos concerning "how to tie a noose" that are accessed via cell phone come with **red** accent warnings and the number of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline against a gray scale, but on a computer, those warnings are noticeably less conspicuous, using all **gray** accents and scales that camouflage life-saving resources.⁶ Prerequisite age and mental health prompts before viewing "how-to" videos are also easily avoided by users, which critically accelerates the time between the impulse and the suicide attempt.

Improvements that are grounded in science and marketing are incredibly important. Along that same vein, we are seeking information about what efforts YouTube has made or will make to combat the suicide epidemic, and in what areas YouTube believes it can improve. At a minimum, we suggest that YouTube should: (i) more prominently display the mental health resources available, using larger font and bright red scales; (ii) include more pop-up warnings about suicide and more mental health prompts that must be answered and redirect users away from the "how-to" video's URL address; and (iii) deploy lengthy educational introductory videos that cannot be skipped each time a "how-to" video is accessed. With respect to that third suggestion, these introductory videos should promote self-care, mental health services, and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, putting more time between an adolescent's suicide impulse and the viewing of content that may assist in a suicide attempt.

As members of Congress, our focus is on reversing the alarming suicide epidemic among young people in our communities. Looking to the efforts that YouTube has already made as a template, it is our sincere hope that we can work together to obtain continued, commonsense improvements for the purpose of protecting children and families across our country.

Thank you in advance for your understanding and cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,



Susan Wild
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress

⁴ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802245?hl=en>

⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165178119319134>

⁶ Enclosed herewith are screenshots of a phone search versus a computer search.

/s/

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

/s/

Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress

/s/

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

/s/

André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

/s/

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

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Jimmy Panetta
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John Katko
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David Trone
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Tim Ryan
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Grace F. Napolitano
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Michael F.Q. San Nicolas
Member of Congress

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Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

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Steve Cohen
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Josh Harder
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Ben McAdams
Member of Congress

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Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

/s/

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

/s/

Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/

Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

← How to tie a noose X RSS

Need help? In the United States



Call 1-800-273-8255
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline



Text "STAY" to 741-741
Crisis Text Line



How to Tie the Hangman's Noose - ITS Knot of the Week HD

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